

HOW TO LISTEN TO (communicate with) YOUR CHILD OR YOUR TEEN

Relationships are living things and need to be tended on a regular basis in order for them to thrive. Emotional connectedness is one of the results of thriving relationships. When it comes to your children, you want strong emotional connections as you go into adolescence. At that point, peers and their own very legitimate need to separate from you are pulling them away from the family. The stronger the connection at the outset, the more likely your relationship will survive those years.

One of the best ways to maintain a strong connection with your children or your teens is to listen to them carefully and often. Stephen Covey says "Seek first to understand." If you listen well and often, your children will be more receptive to your words. You will have earned the right to be heard.

Listed below are some suggestions you can tuck away and review often:

- **Listen to the language of behavior** - tears, a laugh, a sullen face, or a slammed door sometimes says more than words do.
- **Respond to verbal and non-verbal communication appropriately** - let your teen realize that you accept his or her feelings, whatever they may be, and therefore, it is safe for them to express those feelings to you in a respectful manner.
- **Don't tell your teen that he or she should feel differently or should not feel the way they do** - not if you want them to talk to you
- **Learn to respond reflectively** - reflect back to your teen, in a non-judgmental way, what you think they are feeling and/or saying. Paraphrasing it is okay.
- **Be less teachy** - don't lecture all the time, just take time to be with and enjoy your teen. When their eyes glaze over or you lose eye contact, quit talking. We tend to repeat ourselves when lecturing which is a surefire way for them to tune us out.
- **Realize the great importance of just listening** - this is one of the best ways to build a relationship and to enhance your teen's feelings of self-esteem and self-confidence
- **Be an active listener** - make a conscious, intentional, and obvious effort to understand and care about what your teen is saying to you. Listen with your eyes and your body as well as your ears.
- **Don't correct grammar when listening**
- **Try not to overreact when your child tells you something alarming** - stay calm and you can increase the likelihood that they will come to

you with disturbing thoughts or situations rather than avoiding talking to you.

- **It is never too late to start listening** - better communication is always possible
- **Don't judge what is important and what is not important** - if it is important to your teen then it is important to you!
- **If you cannot listen at the moment, make a date to listen in the very near future and DO NOT break that date!!!**
- **Take your teen on listening dates** - to the Sonic, fishing or wherever
- **Allow for disagreement** - allowing teens to express different opinions means we are strong enough to be challenged and big enough to back down if necessary. We can agree to disagree. They do, however, need to disagree in a respectful manner.
- **Avoid using sarcasm or ridicule** - DO NOT humiliate your teen ever, ever, ever!
- **Avoid the use of labels** - we all want the freedom to change and labels have a way of sticking in bad ways for a very long time.